

INFORMATION REPORT INFORMATION

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

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1. After World War II, among those sent to Belene and put to forced labor were a special group of political prisoners. These were persons who had been arrested for so-called political crimes concerning which the authorities did not have enough evidence to send them to trial and condemn them, were sent to Belene and held there for an unspecified time. In 1953 the regime decided to release these persons and replace them with regularly tried political prisoners. This release started in August 1953 and was completed by November of the same year. Already in 1952 there were approximately 1,500 regularly condemned political prisoners, but these were kept in a separate section from that of the political inmates who were known as "Lagerists."

2. Following World War II, those citizens who were held to be reactionaries because of their political past, were arrested. Thus personalities of the old regime, large landowners, intellectuals, industrialists, and businessmen were considered enemies of the people. Among the businessmen, all those who dealt with foreign firms, even though their dealings were small, were included in the category of enemies of the people.

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4. The interrogations were generally carried out at night. The interrogators were changed every six hours, while the person being questioned was kept awake by various means, without food or drink.

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-2-

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5. In Persin Island at Belene, housing as such was never constructed for the inmates. When they arrived, they were forced to dig for themselves a shelter in the ground. These were holes 12-14 x 5 meters in size. The cover was made haphazardly with tree trunks, branches, and reeds, all joined together with earth. There were no bedding facilities. The inmates built their own beds of boards covered with small branches and straw. When it rained heavily, water came in from all sides. As many as 100 persons were housed in one of these shelters. After a long day of work they were forced to fight each other for a bit of space, limited to 40 centimeters per person.
6. The men were employed in the cultivation of hemp on the island. Originally, the island was abandoned. The first inmates, [redacted] were employed at clearing the area of trees which was later cultivated to hemp, for the most part, and also to corn and barley. The cultivated area of the island covers a total of 72,000 square decameters. The inmates were employed at planting and harvesting hemp, corn, and barley and also at cleaning the hemp. Those working with the hemp had to cut (starting at the September harvest) 750 square meters of hemp per day. Of each group of three men, one was employed at tying together the bundles of hemp, and the other two were also held responsible for cutting his 750 square meters. If this norm was not achieved, the bread ration was reduced by 1/4, 1/3 or 1/2. In the island the hemp was beaten by hand in order to separate the grains. It was then sent to Belene. All transportation on the island was done by means of wheelbarrows. Only ploughing was done by means of agricultural tractors.
7. In 1950 the inmates were forced to evacuate the island because it was flooded by the Danube. The men were transferred to the Belene plain, which was far less cultivated and far larger than the area of Persin Island, and were put to work excavating canals for irrigation and land reclamation. Persin Island was evacuated from February to September 1950.
8. The men at Belene were allowed the following rations:
- a. 540 grams of bread per day (a 1,080 gram loaf for every two men);
 - b. A bowl of soup at noon and at night made with greens, beans, potatoes, and barley;
 - c. A cup of tea in the morning;
 - d. A little meat mixed with the soup once or twice a week, and often only once a month; and
 - e. Very rarely, 30 grams of cheese.
9. With regard to clothing, the inmates were worse off than the gypsies. They wore old military uniforms no longer in use; their coats were torn, with holes, and threadbare. They wore rubber shoes. The main trial for the men was the lack of a change of clothing; all were dirty, muddy, and when it rained their clothes were soaked with water.

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-3-

10. The inmates were divided into three categories: I, II, and III. [redacted] those in I Category were considered to be the most dangerous. Those in the I Category were allowed to receive one package and one letter every four months; those in II Category were allowed one package and one letter every three months; and those in III Category were allowed one package and one letter every two months.
11. The inmates received a pay equal to 15% that of the ordinary union wages.
12. The average number of inmates at Belene at one time was about 3,000. In the same area, in a nearby island, there were 150 women confined.
13. Barbed wire was drawn along the limits of the island and through the area where the inmates were confined. Around and in the interior of the island there were sentry posts where guards were on duty. Sentry duty was carried out by a unit of the People's Militia, commanded by Major Rashko Kitov. [redacted]
14. The release of the inmates as stated above started in August 1953 and was completed in November 1953. The release was carried out in groups of 150-200-300 at a time. The 150 women were also released. Prior to leaving the camp each one was told that, although guilty, the regime had adopted a clemency measure provided that they maintained a "patriotic" attitude in the future. The last remaining men (about 150) were interrogated once again for over a month, by the Dirshavna Sigurnost and then finally released. The inmates were replaced by 3,000-4,000 regularly tried political prisoners. Of these about 1,500 had already been transferred to the island since 1952 and kept apart from the other inmates. The political prisoners are condemned to terms at hard labor varying between five and 15 years. The majority of the men were accused of the following:
- a. Clandestine attempt to escape from Bulgaria;
 - b. Failure to denounce friends who planned on escaping from Bulgaria, concerning whose plans the person was cognizant;
 - c. Sabotage; and
 - d. Espionage.
- The prisoners were transferred from various prisons where they had been held previously.
15. [redacted] the following personalities who had been imprisoned at the camp:
- a. General Vŭlkov;
 - b. Lieutenant Colonel Porkov;
 - c. Major Dikov;
 - d. Former Minister of Finance Stoyanov, released;
 - e. Former minister Rashkov, one time director of the Bank of Credit of Bulgaria; [redacted]

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-4-

- f. Dimitŭr Savov, former president of the Bulgarian Chamber of Commerce, who died in the prison in 1952;
- g. Dimitŭr Valev, from Stara Zagora, former minister in 1940-41, released; and
- h. Former minister Gerginov, who died in camp.

The men listed under a.b. and c. were tried in Sofia in 1953 and condemned to varying prison terms.

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